

Lost and found

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Summary: Diamond's adventures continue...

Lost and found

Authors note: english is not my native tongue, so I would be thankful for receiving any suggestions on obsolete terms/words. Mail me: last_blast@my-deja.com

include disclaimer.h

All I own is Diamond, Needles and Cloud Dancer they're mine and should not be used without asking me

Feedback: yeah, gimme that !

++++ First Run ++++

Next morning all but two were having breakfast in the mess. They were talking about Karmas first single-run that was scheduled this morning when Tank rushed in, served himself and sat down to eat. Neo and Trinity got up, giving the others a sign to follow. Neo grabbed a protesting Karma and pulled him out. Tank ducked over his bowl, knowing what was coming, he kept his eyes on the table.

"You are late." Morpheus said

"I'm sorry, Sir. It won't happen again, Sir"

"I hope so. You know I don't care how you spend you time off and I am the last to envy your luck. But I cannot accept personal affairs inflicting the work on this ship. OK?"

"Yes, Sir."

"So get ready quickly." Morpheus left.

phew! Could have been worse

Meanwhile Trinity had a word with Diamond of similar content.

2 Minutes later the whole crew gathered at the operators desk while Morpheus hooked up Karma. The task was straight and easy: go to the "Underground", a hackers hangout and deposit a message at a certain place in the men's room.

As soon as Karma was uploaded, Diamond jumped into her seat. Without known by the first-runner, Morpheus always sent a backup after. He jacked Diamond in.

Tank stared when Dancer punched him telling him with low voice

"Easy, brother. Don't make Morpheus kick your ass."

Tank fired her upload-command as soon as Karma had left the 5th floor.

Diamond followed Karma like a distant shadow. She waited outside the bar, smoking a cigarette (Davidoff Classics, her favorite brand, hardcoded in her upload equipment), when the phone beeped.

"What?"

"Trouble. Go to the backdoor, take him with you. I'll find you another exit."

"Agents?" she closed her eyes, held her breath.

"Just cops."

"All right" she cut the line.

Diamond reached the backstreet when Karma staggered out of the backdoor. Something was wrong with him, but there was no time to wonder. She could hear the cops running down the hallway. Karma slackened. She grabbed him, yelled into his ears

"RUN! You fuckin' son of a bitch, RUN!"

Her vioce was so forcing, all her willpower put into, even the crew back on the Neb could feel her iron will pushing Karma ahead. She dragged him along, handling the phone with the other hand, hitting the dial-button

"Where?"

"Six blocks east and south."

"No way! Find us a hide-out!"

"Return to the alley, turn right, cross and then the next street left. Yellow dumpster."

Diamond cut the line. She saw the street but she felt Karma slowing down more and more. They had just reached the shadows when Karma collapsed. Cursing wildly Diamond dragged the limb body to the dumpster. She stopped for one single breath - gathering

concentration, then she lifted Karma up and into. She followed and hid them both under the rotten stinky debris that filled 3/4 of it.

Two beer-bellied cops entered the street, heavily panting they stared into the dark. They decided it was useless to follow the boy across the construction-area that started at the end of the street. They went away.

Diamond did not dare to stir. She waited for her operator to contact her as soon as it was safe. The stink was overwhelming she felt the need to throw up and an endless time passed before the phone beeped again

"Get me outta here!"

"Try to wake Karma. If you can't, you will wait until Morpheus and Nop will come to pick him up"

"Shit"

She pushed Karma, he groaned. She slapped his face, harder the 2nd time. The next hit was blocked by Karma.

"Come on, man, no time to sleep."

Diamond dialed again

"OK, champ: give us that fuckin' exit!"

They reached the exit after 2 stops: Karma was heavily throwing up - aftermath of the heavy hit he received against his head in the bar.

"You first, Karma."

He vanished. The phone rang again and within an instant Diamond was back aboard.

++++

Weeks went by, searching for potentials, escaping squiddies, observing targets, training. Whenever their schedule allowed it, Tank and Diamond spent their time together, talking, sharing, making love.

Diamond told Tank about her life in the Matrix, about her Training, Zen.

Especially the last was too philosophic for him. He found it fascinating because he saw what she was capable of, how strong she was but he couldn't understand it. He liked to listen to her because she held a lot of wisdom. After a while he understood that this way of thinking and living had not very much to do with being what he considered a "good" person, but with doing whatever you do with all power you have, physically and mentally. It was somehow about loosing fear by denying the small self-centered ego.

"But I wouldn't want to loose that," he said, "because it is just this tiny Tank-ego that loves you."

She smiled, and it even reached her eyes. How he loved that! The fact she kept that only for those precious moments when they were alone made it even more special. Her ice would melt for him and him alone.

++++ Drop a brick +---

The youngsters often spent their free time in the mess, dreaming about the girls in Zion. One evening Tank strolled by to get himself another coffee when he heard the boys talking about the female crew-members

"It's a pity these two hot chicks are already given." Karma sighed.

"You better watch your language!" Needles advised.

"Ah, you wouldn't count Diamond." Nop said with a debrecating gesture.

"Hold it!" Needles snapped.

"Why not?" Karma was now curious

"I just doubt she could have a normal relationship after all..."

"Shut up you idiot!" Needles yelled at Nop.

"I wonder why Tank is content with such a situation." Nop said when Tank stepped in.

He was pale but calm.

"What situation exactly do you mean, Nop?" Tank asked

"Whoa, Tank..." Nop nearly spilled his water

"You stupid bigmouth!" Needles glared at Nop, "Tank, you shouldn't take him too serious."

"Would you explain what you consider being a normal relationship?" Tank stepped closer up.

"Jeeze, I just doubt such a literally fucked up chick..."

Tank's hand grabbed Nop's throat, pulling him out of the seat, pinning him against the wall.

"What are you talking about, man?"

Needles escaped, looking for Morpheus to stop Tank from whatever he'd do.

"It's in her file." Nop coaxed, his throat still squeezed by an iron fist.

"What file? Are you snooping around private records?"

"Needles wanted me to download all available medical data from all the unplugged here. It's quite normal to read stuff to make sure it's what you want."

Tank pushed Nop back onto his chair and left for the medical bay, connecting to the medical DB. He found the medical file that reported in dry words Diamonds state when police brought her to the hospital. In between the lines Tank found a hell he'd never been able to think of. A police-file with Diamonds statement was attached but he couldn't go on. He felt sick, the world was spinning.

Morpheus came, half-dressed, still wet from the shower where Needles had found him. He looked at the file and closed it.

"Tank, what are you doing?"

"What they did to her... she never told me."

Morpheus sighed and put a hand on Tanks shoulder

"Go to your room and wait for me."

He watched Tank leave. *Poor boy. Hope this won't break him*. He went to the mess where Nop was still recovering from the unexpected violent attack. Morpheus closed the door, he did not sit down.

"You have read files not meant for you. In addition you should have kept quiet about what you have found while searching for Needles. I understand you were clearly instructed by him.

I told you before that other crew-members' personal affairs are none of your business. But you ignore it. I told you to stop pecking on Dancer..."

"He's a fucking homo!" Nop snarled.

"Who cares? As long as he isn't pressing you that's of no interest for you. Now I find you gossiping about Diamond. Your acting means constant disturbance of my crew and the peace on my ship. So - how can I stop you?"

Nop rested quiet in complete ignorance of the fact Morpheus wanted him to answer something. Morpheus continued

"Since you have no idea of you own, I will tell you: Except during mealtimes and the use of the showers you will stay in your room. You are excluded from any duties except runs.

You will show perfect behaviour when around others and of course 100% engagement on runs. Do you completely understand these orders?"

"Yes Sir." Nop gritted his teeth.

"You don't have the slightest idea who Diamond is. On this ship, in this world, she is the most dangerous person around. She will not like what you did and she is a critical character. If it hadn't been Tank but Diamond you'd probably be dead. You can leave now."

Nop went to his room without another word or look. Morpheus stayed

for another minute before he got up with a groan *Time to kick another ass! As if he isn't beaten enough.* He went down to Tanks room. Tank sat there, head and shoulders hanging down - just a big pile of misery. He hated to come hard on him in this situation.

"You broke the rules."

No reaction

"You attacked a mate!"

"He was.... he drove me nuts. I...." Tank stopped with a helpless gesture.

"You accessed files restricted to either medical or administrative use and you violated a mates rights for privacy."

"And Nop?" Tank retorted, still upset.

"He's not the subject."

"He knew, Needles knew, you do - how about the rest? Was I the only one who didn't?", Tank was desperate, "She lied to me...."

"Needles wouldn't say a word, he's serious about that and you know. He wouldn't even discuss that with Diamond unless it would have influence on a medical treatment.

And I knew it. Sure. Don't you forget that, as your captain, I need to know as much as possible about all of you? If only to estimate your limits and abilities or have a clue about critical characters. I cannot ignore what happened tonight. Since your behavior was always excellent I take this as a unique exception. Therefore the will be no lawsuit put up."

Tank looked up in surprise as if he only now realized what consequences his actions could have brought up to him

"Thank you, Sir."

"But: You will stay in your room except you are on duty. Needles will provide you with all you need. You will stay there ALONE. I hate to say that because you are miserable enough: ZERO private contact with Diamond. Got that?"

"'Sir, with all respect - " Tank started a protest, but was stopped by a gesture.

"No! You will do as you are told until the next 2 extractions are completed. You are my operator, Tank. During the next 4 days we all depend on you. You are the best operator I ever had, but even you must be 100% awake and concentrated during the next tasks. OK?"

"Yes, Sir."

"I'm sure she didn't intent to hurt you."

Morpheus left him and went back up to join Trinity who was on her

night-shift.

"May I ask what happened here tonight?" she asked him.

Morpheus sighed.

"Trin, my crew is falling apart! I can't remember having such an unstable crew ever before. I am constantly kicking ass and things are getting worse ever."

"Hey, it's not that bad!"

"Tonight Nop - shit! I can't tell you without putting myself under arrest right after doing so." he smirked, "Ummmm, I will try to tell you what happened without touching that delicate subject... well late evening out three youngsters had one of their "mens talk" in the mess. Somehow their subject turned to Diamond. Nop knew something he wasn't supposed to talk about. He only knew because he had been hacking for Needles. Nop must have been braging about what he knew and Tank overheard it."

"Did that concern Diamond being raped?" Trinity asked

"I will not answer this question without my lawyer! Anyway Nop gave some really mean comments and Tank freaked out. You know, this is the first time I will have to set a password on the restricted files folder. I decided Nop will leave this ship as soon as possible and until that day he will stay under arrest."

"This is the right desicion, Morpheus. You will see, when he leaves your crew will be back."

"I hope so. Wow, I'm tired. Would you please instruct Diamond right next morning to stay away from Tank? She will have her own private briefing tomorrow after breakfast."

"Won't she go for him tonight?"

"No. As far as I know, she prefers to be alone before a major run. 'Night."

Next morning Morpheus told Diamond in short words about the last night and what consequences the two men had to bear. She was just as cold as most time - she showed no reaction

"There are two simple orders for you: first: you will stay away from Tank until the second extraction is done. Don't confuse him; be professional. After these days I will try my best to give you both as much time as necessary. Second: don't you dare to touch Nop! If you do, I will dump you in the sewers. No kidding! Do you think you are OK? Can we proceed just as planned?"

Diamond nodded and left for her chair. The others were just waiting for her and Morpheus to join them. Dancer and Needles assisted the runners.

Everything went smooth that day and they were soon out again. Lunch was cheerful; they celebrated another success and the unharmed return of everyone.

Late evening, everybody else was asleep when Nop went for a shower. When he turned off the water and stepped out of the cabin, Diamond stood there.

"Woah, Diamond! I'm sure I locked that door."

"You bloody bastard! There was no need to tell anybody! See what you've done to him!" she was sad and terribly angry.

"I did nothing! You did that yourself: you never told him." He was seeking for a way to escape, "I guess I know pretty well why you never told him", he sneered, "you liked it, right?"

"Shut up." She whispered with a glare but he wouldn't stop now, hoping to hit a weak point and take advantage of that

"I wonder why you stick to that sissy?"

"Shut up!" Diamond gritted her teeth

"I doubt he can fuck you the way you need it..."

Diamonds exploded so fast, Nop could never really tell what happened. Her stretched-out fingers hit Nops solarplexus and he collapsed, grasping for air. Diamond grabbed his hair, pulled his head backwards while he was still on his knees. Out of nowhere a razorblade appeared in Diamonds right hand. It rushed down towards the hard-pulsing artery in Nops throat. She stopped less than an inch before the blade would have raged into Nops flesh.

She knew that expression on his face: raw fear. She'd seen that many times before.

"Hmmm, fear's got a bitter taste, ey? Listen, sucker: I won't kill you here, now. But by the time you leave this ship you should pray to never meet me again. My face will be the last thing you'll see in your life. Did you know I was really good at giving Buckweeds?" with her best killer-grin she put the blade away and stepped back,

"uh, you gotta clean up before you leave."

Nop looked down at the yellow puddle he was kneeling in.

Next day they held the final meeting in which the last details were discussed and everyone could ask late questions.

"Neo, you will make contact with him. Nop, you'll drive the car. Leave the engine running and wait inside for the others to return. Diamond, Karma and Trinity, you go in first; Diamond covers the backdoor near the restrooms, Karma at the front entrance. Trin, you stay at the bar. Neo will come in 2 minutes later. Diamond can tell you the way to that bar."

Diamond gave Morpheus a curious look.

"We'll go into the LASF-sprawl, your home. The meeting is in the "Naked Eye"." Morpheus explained.

"Isn't that risky? I mean: what if somebody recognizes me?"

"That's not the place you used to go. It should be OK."

"Well then I'll have to pick up some more data - if it's OK I better go?"

"OK"

Diamond left for the consoles. Needles was sitting there and gladly left. Diamond took a seat and stared at the keyboards. She hadn't had too many opportunities to learn the real codes or even the strange signs on these keyboards.

"Can't be that different. Lemme see..."

Slowly and with many errors she dug her way into the system. She was so absorbed in her trial she hadn't realized somebody was watching her for a while.

"What the hell are you doing there?" Tank asked with his best don't-mess-with-my-computers-voice

"Well, Tank, I'm trying to find out what changed in my hometown since I was unplugged. But I'm too stupid." She sighed.

"Let me do that. Get off!" he waved his hand to make her leave and Diamond hurried. Tank threw himself into the chair that moaned as always

"One day you'll brake it!"

"Did it already twice. Last time Dozer..." he swallowed the still present pain, "... he fixed it with lifetime warranty. I'm still testing."

Diamond stepped back to keep herself from giving him a comforting hug and instead watched his fingers rushing across the keyboards. She did not really understand what he did because all she could think of was how these fingers felt on her skin and how much she missed him. She was just about to leave him, because even her professionalism had its limits, when he stopped:

"Got it. Easy walzin'."

"OK. Will you load me that?" she went to a chair, waiting to be plugged in.

"Nope. You will scroll through here."

"Why not?"

"you have already reached your limit for the next 2 days. You've already entered the warning level. You'll end up with an overload-syndrome and Morpheus will rip my ass open - and it is still sore."

"What's an overload-syndrome?"

"Guess it's like a balloon you don't stop to inflate. It will explode. You should ask Needles, he's the medic." He left.

With a sigh Diamond started reading.

++++ Blue pills suck ++++

Next evening they prepared to go in. Diamond was excited. They all got jacked in and loaded up. Mopheus stayed at the abandoned factory they had chosen while Diamond directed Nop through the streets.

They entered the bar and took their positions. Shortly after Neo came in He joined Trin at the bar and ordered a drink. How much he enjoyed this! Fake or not. He scanned the bar, saw Karma at the door, his eyes bulging at the sight of so many barely dressed women; Diamond near the back exit, smoking like hell imported cigarettes.

Neo smiled at Trin "Isn't it funny how we all have a certain fable in here?"

"There he is. Good luck."

Neo fought his way through the crowd, approaching his target: a fat boy, 14 years old with dark, greasy hair.

"Hi Thot. Heard you have an appointment tonight?"

Thot twitched and looked at the man who addressed him.

"Are you talking to me?"

"Oh, yeah. Or is there another Thot around?"

"Do I know you?"

"Yeah. My name is Neo. We better leave soon, my backup is nervous and she's always right. Are you ready?"

"Yes."

They turned to the front exit.

All of a sudden hell was on. Cops flooded in from the back door.

"RUN! Meet you at the factory!" Diamond shouted. Shooting at the cops, keeping them under fire with Karma, so Trinity, Neo and Thot could access the exit. The four people shot their way through the unprepared cops at the front, rushing to the car. In a wild chase they escaped.

++++

Diamond hurried through the narrow street and jumped up the next fire-escape. Looking down she couldn't see anybody following her. On the 3rd floor she entered the building, jogged down the hallway when a door opened right beside her.

She whirled around to face an armed man in sleeves. Furiously she kicked the man's head so hard he crashed dead into another man who stood behind. For a microsecond their eyes locked and they recognized each other.

She wasted no time and overwhelmed the detective who was stunned at her mere sight. She forced him down on his knees, kept motionless in a painful hold.

"I thought you died in that shoot-out" the man said.

"You'd better not recognized me, Jack." Her voice was sad.

"You kill me?"

"I have to. Sorry Jack. You won't feel it."

She placed the gun at the base of his skull and pulled the trigger, blowing off his brain. He was dead before his body hit the ground.

Offering this man her respect had taken too many precious seconds - enough to let the cops reach the room.

With the bang of her gun a taser hit her, jolting 80.000 volts through her body she cramped violently, blood ran out of her nose, she lost bladder control and then faded into darkness.

++++

This took longer than it should. Morpheus hit the dial-button.

"Operator."

"What's going on?"

"They had to get rid of the car. Do the rest by foot. 5 minutes, maybe 10."

"OK"

++++

Five dark shilouettes hurried through the night. While four of them were impatiione, showed no signs of exhaust despite the long way they had already covered, the fifth was heavily panting, sweat was running down his face.

"Stop!" Thot said "you are going to kill me!"

He leaned against a post. His heart was beating so hard and fast he was afraid it would burst.

"WE are already behind schedule. We have to go on." Trinity said impatient.

"I can't."

"You must. Come on, we will slow down a bit!" Trin urged him merciless. They reached the factory 15 minutes after Morpheus had called Tank

"Where's Diamond?" he asked them

"We got separated at the bar. She'll have to make it all by foot, so that'll take a while." Trinity explained.

"OK, then. Prepare everything next door."

While the others disappeared through a fire-proof steel-door, Mopheus offered Thot a seat: a big soft brown leather chair that absolutelyley didn't fit into this factory filled with rotten automatons and debris.

Two pills were offered. Thot was thinking long, kneading his lower lip as he always did when thinking hard. Finally he took the blue pill with trembling hands:

"Sorry, guess I'm not ready yet."

Morpheus hid his disappointment. He stood up and opened the door.

"Karma, Nop: You remember where you left the car?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Go and try to bring it here. There's a boy who needs to be brought home."

"Naaaaw!" Karma couldn't believe it "shit!"

They had to wait 20 minutes for the car. Still no trace of Diamond. Sleeping Thot was brought home, then they gathered again at the factory.

"Something went wrong with her. But we can't do anything now." Morpheus punched the phone-keys "Download, Tank!"

++++

When they opened their eyes back on the Neb they found the deck messy and unusual busy. Tank was still hacking like crazy while Needles hovered around Diamonds chair.

"What happened?" Mopheus inquired

"I've lost her" Tank did not move his eyes off the code "suddenly she was gone. That happens. Just when we got ready to unload you, we saw the blood... we have no idea what happened and I can't find her signature."

"Can't be: she's alive."

"Yeah, I know! I'm running scanners: no result."

Morpheus watched the scene: Needles running diagnostic programs, checking bio-data while Trinity wiped off the blood from Diamonds face and throat. There was nothing he could do. Trinity said something to Neo who left thereafter.

"Holy shit!" Trinity cursed "Needles: what's this?" she pointed at the darkened pants. Needles looked, touched and smelled at his

fingers

"Urine. We have to undress her."

"Strong arms needed!" Trinity called out.

Morpheus stepped closer and carefully lifted the light body up while Trinity started to undress her. Neo arrived with two blankets, staring at the somewhat surrealistic scene. They covered her in the blankets to keep her warm.

Needles and Neo went to the medical bay where Dancer was caring for the man they had unplugged 2 days before. Needles took a transfusion with halter and several more tubes and hoses Neo couldn't name. When everything was installed, Needles took a blood sample and put it into the analyzer.

++++

All but Nop gathered at the consoles, trying to figure out what could have happened. They looked at Needles.

"Half an hour. Actually the only thing I can imagine is an epileptic seizure. That would explain all but the bleeding. But I have no idea about the signature."

"I don't know." Tank said "maybe with a severe loss of consciousness might cause a part of the RSI to fade. I'm not sure. Never heard of anything like this." He closed his eyes at the thought of Diamond lying somewhere completely helpless.

They couldn't do anything but wait. They felt completely helpless and nothing is as discouraging.

Finally Dancer came to tell the analyze was ready. Tank brought it on-screen and Needles took a closer look.

"It all looks so normal, I could expect her calling next minute, givin us shit for letting her wait so long..."

"OK. We'll have to wait until she can make contact. This was a long day for all of us. You better go to sleep now." Morpheus send them off.

Reluctantly they left until he was alone with Tank. It was clear Tank wouldn't leave.

"You can't do more. Get some rest, Tank."

"I can't sleep. She..." he stared over to her body

"OK. I'll be back in 3 hours to relieve you. She's gonna make it, Tank. She is strong." Morpheus patted his shoulder and left.

++++

While Tank sat there, alone, he tried to remember what exactly had happened. It wasn't unusual a group got divided and it wasn't unusual too that a split off member somehow could not make up contact. He had lost guys before (and wanted to kick himself for that every time).

But either they were dead right after or they managed to contact the ship within 2 hours. He checked the time: 5 hours or so, now.

Not really something to worry about! He told himself *but all that blood?*

++++

Loud bangs woke Diamond. She opened her bloody eyes and sat up. Every fiber in her body ached like hell. She was in a prison-cell.

"Get up you bitch!" the warden called "they wanna see you."

When she rose she realized she was cuffed, hands and feet. *Damn it: bars, no chains. Shit!* They went into the elevator, went up 2 floors and she was brought into an interrogation-room. Two detectives entered, one male, one female. No matter what they asked her, all Diamond did was staring right through them, quietly repeating her personal mantra, flooding her mind with it. After some 20 minutes another woman entered. She was well dressed and looked angry.

"Did you try to violate my clients rights, officers?" she asked

"Oh, Ms. Parker, no! We never would. And even if - she's not responding."

The lawyer took a closer look at Diamond

"Christ! Did she see a doctor?"

"Umm, no yet..."

"OK, detectives: this woman will be taken to a shower right now, you will provide clothes to change and then she will be taken to a medic if you don't want me to cram up your asses."

She hadn't quite finished when all of a sudden Diamond cramped again. She fell off the chair, her nose was bleeding again. She did not loose consciousness this time - she could enjoy the complete pain.

They took her to a doctor immediately. He shrugged - "Taser aftermath. Otherwise you're OK. You might suffer some more seizures during the next days."

++++

She was returned to that interrogation-room. Only the lawyer was there. She introduced herself

"I'm Angela Parker. The state of California made me your lawyer. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

"Yes." Diamonds voice sounded small "Will you get me out of here?" pleading eyes looking up at Parker.

"No way. They say you killed at least 4 cops last night - one was really executed by you. No judge ever would give you a chance to escape."

Diamond grew nervous. She rose her cuffed hands.

"I'm sorry. I may be your lawyer, but I'm not crazy." Parker snorted.

"I... I can't go back in there..." Diamonds eyes moved around unsteadily.

"What's up with you?" Parker wasn't quite sure what was going on, but several red alarm-lights lit up in her head.

"I can't go back, I'm too scared. Please!" She was panting, her hands clung to the table, "I've been there before and they...." she hesitated, "it was terrible..." she was trembling now "Please, don't send me back in!" Diamond was desperate, close to a panic.

"I'm sorry. All I can do is get a solitary confinement for you, so they may give your hands free in there. Is there anything else I can do for you?" Parker was angry like hell. These cops really thought they could get away with everything!

Diamond needed a while to calm down a bit.

"Maybe." She said, "could you send an e-mail for me? My folks have no idea where I am..."

"As long as it's legal?"

"It is. Give me something to write, please."

Parker handed Diamond paper and pencil and she scribbled something with still trembling hands, then returned the paper back to Parker.

"On top is the internet-adress of a BBS. Put a new post there with the content I've written below. Just tell me what they answer. That's all."

Parker stared at the sheet:

"Re: #183427058 calling from LAPD

Text: Dancer: name your sisters heart."

Parker frowned "This makes no sense. Is that kind of a secret code?"

"No. If you want you can give them a copy, but it is just what it reads. It will tell my people I'm alive. There's only one person on earth who can return the correct answer. So I will be sure the message reached them. Maybe they can afford to bail me out."

They will pull the plug as soon as they come to know I am in here.

"OK, that's all for now. This afternoon I will return to prepare your interrogation. Bye"

"Remember my cuffs! Don't let them leave me so helpless" Diamond

pleaded..

She was brought to a single -cell and her hands were freed. As soon as she was alone she checked for cameras: none. Physically she felt terrible: for a good show she had pushed herself into hyperventilation and it wasn't easy to come down again. But she allowed herself a satisfied smile

They should definitely give me an Oscar! I knew she would gulp every bit of my bait

++++

Neo was watching the screens, looking over to Diamond's body from time to time. Sooner that morning her nose had been bleeding a bit but nothing else had happened since.

BEEP BEEP BEEP

He whirled around

ID_TRACKER SUCCESS PRESS FOR INFO ANY OTHER KEY TO CONTINUE

He pressed the L and saw the address of a BBS they sometimes visited and a Matrix-sector from which a post was uploaded: from the LASF-sprawl.

He checked the board and found the message. Nobody in there could have had knowledge of Dancer. It must have been from Diamond!

"We got her!" he yelled

From everywhere they came by

"Where?"

"How's she?"

Questions from all sides.

"OK, I don't know what it means, but it's her ID in the subject and some weird stuff for Dancer - have a look."

All eyes were on Dancer and when he agreed a collective exhale filled the room.

"It's her. No one else could ask this."

"You know what she wants?"

"Sure."

"What?"

"I can't say that loud: it's a four-letter-word."

Trinity left to wake Tank *it's a shame to wake him, but we need Mr. Wizard now* She knocked at the door but there was no answer. She went in: the room was empty *sure!* she smiled and went over to Diamonds room. Again no answer to her knocking but when she stepped in she

found Tank fast asleep.

"Tank? Hey, wake up."

He turned around slowly "hmmmm?"

"We've found her."

Instant awake! He hugged Trin and rushed up to the controls.

"Where's she?"

"LAPD." Neo said

"You're kidding! How could she access a computer there?"

"Instead of asking me stupid questions you could find and check the sender of that posting." Neo grinned.

"Out of my chair!"

Few minutes later he knew

"OK. Poster is a Angela R. Parker, lawyer. Address & Phone listed. If anybody is interested in further details - such a bra-size and color of underwear: that has to wait. Altogether everything looks realistic. There's medic-data in various hospitals, account-balance, history. Looks like she's clean."

"So send a reply to her mail-account." Morpheus gave his OK, "Dancer will tell you what to answer."

Dancer stepped up close and typed in T-A-N-K.

"'S that all?" Neo asked.

"Well, yes." Dancer shrugged.

"Indeed a four-letter-word!" Morpheus laughed and the others joined in.

++++ No Way Out? ++++

The mess was the only room with enough seats for everybody, so they gathered there. They felt cheerful, were joking and laughing but after a while Morpheus asked for attention.

"I've spent time reading my manuals and studying orders & directives: there's no room for interpretation." , he sighed, "as long as the rescue of a single crew member means a risk for others, this single member has to be left fo good. I'm sorry."

Tank sat there, eyes closed in pain. He had known. Everybody knew these orders. But of course everybody believed in the hope these rules would not apply to themselves.

"Seems I constantly have problems with general orders.", Neo broke the silence, " for me there are 3 reasons not to listen:

1) Tank would free her, but he can't go. I do. He's my friend so why shouldn't I lend him a hand? 2) Diamond saved my life in Zion, that's for sure. So I guess, I owe her something. 3) I just can't accept that some lives are considered being of higher value. That is wrong! Neither me nor Morpheus are worth more than Karma or Diamond or anybody else! Don't get me wrong, Morpheus, but if you won't let me go, you' better confine me."

"Most of that applies to me, too." Trinity agreed.

"Fuck those manuals!" Karma growled. "I mean, she's only in such a predicament because we constantly risk our lives for guys we don't even know. So hell! Why shouldn't we risk our lives for someone we live with?"

"Yeah, right!" even Nop couldn't help to agree. It could have been him or Karma left in there.

Morpheus' face lit up to a proud smile

"Here's the crew I have missed for so long! Well spoken, Neo. - Tank, find the place she's in, get the building's blueprints and let us make up a plan!"

"Aye, Sir." Tank still felt a bit dizzy from that emotional rollercoaster-ride he'd been on all day. He hurried to the controls.

...a bit later...

"She's in the basement, here", Tank pointed at a certain area on a blueprint projection, "That means only one exit: upstairs Unless..."

"What?"

"We could be really daring: There's a hard lined phone down there for the arrested. It's beside the warden's office. Then you'd need only to get in and don't have to worry for getting out again."

++++ Unsolved Case +---

A young red-haired man showed up at the info-desk at the LA police headquarter. The officer addressed him

"How can I help you?"

"Hi. I'm Peter Jordan. My sister is in your custody. Can I see her, please?", Karma said.

The officer searched his terminal.

"Sorry lad. What is her first name?"

"Christie" Karma said just the first name that came to his mind

"Again: no. Sorry."

"Maybe you just don't know her name. She can be pretty stubborn."

She's of my size, very short dark-brown hair, grey eyes, athletic. We're a bit worried, Sir, because she's a bit - errr - weird." Karma did his best to play the worried little brother.

"I think there's someone who matches your description. Wait a second."

Another officer appeared and led Karma to the elevator. When the doors closed, Neo slipped in, wearing a police-uniform.

"Oh, thought you'd go upwards..."

Karma's silenced gun plopped, Neo pushed the stop-button. Together they shoved the dead on top of the elevator, then reactivated the cabin.

They met the wardens.

"Hi. That crazy bitch from tonight? He might identify her."

"4th cell on the left. But she's with her lawyer in the visitor's room down the hall."

"C'm on boy, let's see if she's your sister" Neo directed Karma down the hallway.

They reached the door and opened it. Parker threw Neo an angry glare.

"Hey, Diamond, let's go" Neo concentrated and the cuffs opened around her wrists and ankles. Diamond got up and grinned

"Gee, I was waiting for you to pull the plug!"

"What the hell is going on here?" Parker wasn't sure if she could believe what she just saw.

"You'd better read Lao-Tse, and thanks for the e-mail. If you promise to stay here for 5 minutes, we won't harm you. - Karma?"

Diamond gestured the young fighter to take care of the woman. Parker backed into a corner where Karma put her to sleep with a well aimed grip on some nerve-nodes.

Up the hall they heard voices, then the typical sounds of silenced guns - Trinity, Morpheus and Nop had arrived and done their part of the job.

Morpheus had already called Tank and the phone beside the warden's office started ringing. The three had already disappeared when Neo, Diamond and Karma arrived at the phone.

"You first, Diamond."

Off they went.

The escape of that unidentified female cop-killer was never explained.

++++

Diamond opened her eyes and took a deep breath. That evil twitch when the plug was pulled out: she was alive!

As was her stomach. The reason she went "in" always with a clean and empty stomach was that she felt always terribly sick afterwards.

Dancer held her down "Wait. He'll be here in a second."

She realized all the instruments around when Needles disconnected her and how much her body ached.

But all that was tuned out when she saw Tank coming over to her.

He lifted her up and looked deep into her eyes

Oh, Buddha, let me drown in his eyes

"Welcome back home" he whispered and then he kissed her. Under the shouts and whistles of the whole crew she kissed him back.

++++

Down in her room he laid her down.

"I'm so cold!"

After the long passiveness on the cold ship she was now trembling to re-heat herself.

"I'll keep you warm", Tank slipped under the blankets behind her and pulled her close. How he had missed that. It felt so good, it nearly hurt!

"Tank?"

"Hmmm..?"

"I want you to know why I never told you about that incident."

"Now?"

"Yes. I need to make that clear."

He sighed "So let's talk."

"You remember that day in Zion, when Dancer showed you the squiddies?"

"Yeah"

"When I saw you there, thinking they had raped me, you looked so hurt, so desperate. I just never wanted to see that pain in your eyes again. All I wanted was to keep that away from you. Why bother you with long-gone memories?"

"Maybe to share that burden?"

She sighed, sat up and turned to face him

"I coped with that long time ago. I am so much tougher than you - " , she put a finger on his lips to keep him quiet, " - you know I am. I wanted to keep those dark dreams away from you because they poison your soul. I chose the wrong way. I 'm sorry for that. "

His hand reached out to her cheek. It slid to her neck and he pulled her down on him.

"Just promise me one thing: no more lies."

"Never ever. ! "

End
file.